



Norwegian vessels patrol with a Dutch submarine in Arctic waters

NATO and the North Atlantic

Revitalizing Collective Defense and the Maritime Domain

BY INE ERIKSEN SØREIDE

The military-strategic environment in the North Atlantic is changing. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) safeguards a region of stability, cooperation, and respect for international law, but it needs to address Russia's new strategic capabilities and increased military activity in the maritime domain. This article examines current defense and security challenges in the North Atlantic with emphasis on what NATO should do to secure the transatlantic sea lines of communication.

The North Atlantic is Norway's key strategic area. Fisheries, maritime transport, tourism, and the extraction of oil, natural gas, and minerals are all important economic drivers for prioritizing this region. Our long coastline creates an enormous expanse of territorial waters and economic zones, and more than 80 percent of the ocean areas over which we have jurisdiction are located north of the Arctic Circle. Thus, Norwegian territorial rights cover parts of the North Atlantic, the Barents Sea, and the Arctic Ocean. Norway, with a population of just five million people, has jurisdiction over more than 2.2 million square kilometers of sea, an area which is seven times larger than our mainland territory. With great resources comes great responsibility.

Compared to most quarters of the world, the Arctic is a region of stability, respect for international law, and well-functioning multilateral institutions. It is most often associated with environmental concerns and commercial endeavors. Climatic changes are causing reductions in ice coverage and ice volumes, and large areas are becoming more accessible. At times, expectations have been high for the economic potential, be it shipping, exploitation of oil and gas reserves, fishing, or tourism. Such activities add to the inherent strategic importance of the region. However, although there is a potential for increased economic activity, development is slow, especially in today's oil and gas market as prices do not cover the required investment costs. Additionally, climate conditions are also tough, with extreme cold and much wind and fog.

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One might ask why I draw the reader's attention to the North at a time when other regions make international headlines. Indeed, we are experiencing an unprecedented complexity in the European security environment. New and old hybrid, conventional, and asymmetric threats are combined and interwoven, presenting us with an unpredictable and multifaceted security landscape. The Ukraine crisis demonstrated that conflict in Europe is not a phenomenon of the past. Once again, conflict has been waged with overt and covert military means on European soil. Terrorism has struck the heart of Europe several times in recent years, and geographic distance to areas of conflict is no security guarantee. We are seeing unbelievable human suffering, disregard of human rights, disrespect of international law, climate hazards, economic constraints, and social despair. Europe is facing new realities in the east and in the south. Our commitment to universal values is being tested; we must work hard to uphold Western unity and cooperation.

There are also challenges from within. European politics are not in good shape. The combination of migration, economic turmoil, and social difficulties is a fundamental challenge, and we are witnessing radicalization and extremism, combined with the use of violence, to try to achieve the objectives of certain actors. The legitimacy and role of international political institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and NATO, are being questioned and spurring disagreements in and between countries. Radical movements—from both the political left and right—are gaining a foothold, with anti-establishment and anti-modernity sentiments a common feature. At the same time, the refugee crisis is testing the functioning of our

cooperative mechanisms. Political polarization within and between countries is a challenge to our ability to make good decisions, including within the realm of security policy. Political institutions, and our common international security architecture are needed now more than ever. Regional and global unpredictability, emerging threats, and domestic struggles must be met with cooperation and unity.

We experience the changes in our security landscape in different ways. This is only natural. In times like these, however, it is more important than ever that we stand together. "Every man for himself" is no solution. Solidarity is NATO's center of gravity. A threat to one is a threat to all. The Alliance needs to be able to deal with the new and unprecedented complexity in our security environment, and it must acknowledge and address threats and challenges from diverse actors and from all directions. We call this the 360-degree approach.¹ In line with this reasoning, Norway has a special responsibility in the North. Our attention to this region is therefore one of our most important contributions to Allied security.

Part of this new security landscape is a more self-assertive Russia. Russian armed forces are training more and their exercises are of an increasingly complex nature. The scale, scope, and intensity of recent Russian "snap exercises" occurring without advance notification are considerable. In the current tense situation, snap exercises create uncertainty and increase the risk of unintended escalations. This corresponds to a higher level of activity across NATO's area of responsibility. Russia's pattern of military exercises, particularly in the Baltic Sea region, and its violation of the airspace of NATO members and partners, are perceived as threatening by our allies. While

Norway does not consider Russia a military threat today, we cannot discount that its military capabilities could pose a challenge to transatlantic security in the future.

New Military-Strategic Developments in the North

Our greatest concern is Moscow's new strategic capabilities. Russia's development of new high-end military capabilities, including submarines, aircraft, and long-range, high-precision missiles that collectively can target all of Europe, as well as vital transatlantic lines of communication, has the potential for far-reaching and long-term consequences. In addition, Russia has built new garrisons and support facilities along its northern coast and on Arctic islands such as Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, and the New Siberian Islands. Russian authorities use the upgraded and expanded infrastructure for daily policing, but it can also be used for military operations.

Established to defend the Russian homeland and today Russia's only ice-free port in the north, Murmansk remains the base for nuclear submarine-launched ballistic missiles that are capable of inflicting damage on both the United States and Allied territory. The North Atlantic also remains the patrol area of Russian submarines. In 2014, Russia established a new Arctic command in Severomorsk under the commander of the Northern Fleet, with responsibility for the entire Arctic area. The strategic Russian military capabilities based in the North, and the need to protect them, remain the primary reasons for the geostrategic value Moscow places on the region.

We have observed an increased Russian naval presence in the North Atlantic. New strategic nuclear submarines with Bulava missiles are being put into service, and new submarines

with dual capability missiles are also becoming operational. Highly accurate long-range cruise missiles designed for land, sea, and air platforms have also been introduced. In recent years, flights of long-range bombers from the Kola Peninsula south toward Iceland and the United Kingdom have become more sophisticated and frequent. These strategic capabilities join a broader reform of the military structure involving more forward basing, which increases the potential reach of strategic assets.

Russia's introduction of new high-end maritime capabilities poses a particular strategic challenge to NATO. The development and fielding of such assets combined with advanced training and exercises make Russia increasingly capable of conducting Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) operations in the North Atlantic. Similar developments also pose a threat to NATO members and allies operating in the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean.

It is of vital importance that NATO safeguard the sea lines of communication during a crisis or conflict. Its ability to provide mutual support across the Atlantic and in other regions is fundamental to the Alliance's security architecture. Safeguarding NATO's freedom of movement and operation across the North Atlantic is of importance to all of Europe, not only the northern parts of the Alliance. For NATO to take a passive stance in this development is an unacceptable approach.

Stability and Cooperation

At the same time, we strongly believe that it is in the interest of all Arctic states that the North remains a region of stability and predictability through cooperation. Cooperation with Russia based on international law is a precondition for long-term stability in the region. There are

precedents for this. The joint management of fishery resources, for example, has been successful in reducing over-fishing through the implementation of a quota system that serves the long-term interests of the fishing industry in both Russia and Norway. In the spirit of cooperation and peaceful coexistence, we have negotiated a maritime delimitation agreement with Russia that covers the Barents Sea and the

Arctic Ocean. The 2010 agreement solved what had been the single most important unsettled issue between Norway and Russia, and provided us with predictability for our maritime borders. It also provides the legal basis and framework for further Norwegian–Russian cooperation on fisheries, and enables potential cooperation on the development of petroleum resources across the maritime boundary.



Norwegian Maritime Boundaries

As a result of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilization of eastern Ukraine, Norway suspended bilateral military cooperation with Moscow. At the same time, however, both countries are interested in continuing to safeguard stability in the High North. That is why we continue to work together in areas such as search and rescue, and to uphold the Incidents at Sea agreement. Our sustained collaboration on coastguard and border control maintains Norway's ability to exercise authority, secure sovereign rights, and preserve environmental responsibilities in the North. We maintain a direct line between the Norwegian Joint Headquarters and the Russian Northern Fleet. This is especially important to avoid misunderstandings or unintended escalation, and to ensure the security of the people living in the North.

In order to avoid misunderstandings in relation to military exercises and training, it is important to update existing agreements that contribute to openness, predictability, and confidence building. The Vienna Document,² the Open Skies Treaty,³ and the agreement on Conventional Forces in Europe (the CFE Treaty)⁴ constitute important existing mechanisms to this end. However, Russia unilaterally suspended the CFE treaty in 2007, and NATO stopped sharing information with Russia in 2011.

Cooperation in the Arctic Council has been functioning well despite the increased tensions between Russia and Western countries.⁵ This is an important forum for environmental and indigenous issues, as well as research collaboration. Almost all territorial questions in the Arctic have been solved, but processes regarding the continental shelf are still ongoing. In the Arctic Council's 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, all five Arctic coastal

states agreed that the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) would be the basis of all territorial claims in the Arctic.⁶ These states have invested substantial political prestige, resources, and scientific attention to the issue of the continental shelf. UNCLOS provides an integrated and predictable international legal framework for the sea areas, with a firm basis in the UN. It is important that all Arctic littoral states stay committed to UNCLOS. We must work to keep the Arctic Council as a functioning mechanism for the regulation of diverse interests in a region also vested with complex politics.

Norway and the Alliance

As a small state neighboring a nuclear power, the guiding principle for Norway has been balancing deterrence and reassurance toward Russia. Credible deterrence for Norway means standing firm with our allies, exercising our sovereign rights, and making our strategic interests clear. We reassure through a predictable and non-threatening posture. Our defense concept is based on the premise of involving allies early on in a crisis and as seamlessly as possible. The security guarantee embedded in the NATO Charter—along with close and lasting ties with the United States, our most important ally, the United Kingdom, and other key allies—remains the cornerstone of Norway's security strategy.

The United States has prepositioned military equipment in Norway that is available for rapid preparation and debarkation in support of overseas deployments, enabling a strong and credible reinforcement of Europe. The U.S. Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Norway is firm evidence of the American commitment to Norwegian and European security. Norwegian units of all services regularly train

and exercise together with American forces and with other allies. Exercising together maintains interoperability, which keeps collective defense guarantees credible. Joint exercises are also important to show political commitment to collective defense. Moreover, the United States has signaled that it may resume airborne maritime patrol operations from Iceland. The United Kingdom has announced plans to invest in new maritime patrol aircraft to be based in Scotland, while France has also shown greater attention to surveillance, exercises, and training in the High North.

Substantial, yet balanced military peacetime activity in the North Atlantic with multinational participation has been and will remain an important part of a credible, transparent, and accountable policy. Therefore, we would like to see a more frequent presence of Allied forces in the North, training and taking part in exercises. We believe this is important, both as a signal of Allied cohesion and solidarity, and as a way of enhancing the knowledge of operating in the Alliance's own area of responsibility.

Since the Cold War, Norway has kept a watchful eye on military strategic developments in the Barents Sea on behalf of the Alliance. In our efforts to ensure a stable, predictable, and cooperative strategic environment, we maintain armed forces that contribute to deterring and defending against pressure, assault, and attack on Norwegian territory and adjacent areas. The Norwegian armed forces maintains its presence in the High North. The Norwegian joint headquarters is located just north of the Arctic Circle. Several coastguard vessels patrol the vast sea areas in which Norway has jurisdiction. F-16s are continuously on high-readiness as part of NATO's integrated air defense system. The majority of

our land forces are located in our most northern counties. We have invested in Aegis frigates, coast guard vessels, and maritime helicopters. Our acquisition of a new fighter aircraft, the F-35, is also a part of this overall investment. More than simply a replacement for the F-16, the new F-35 adds a wide range of new capabilities to our armed forces. Its long-range, precision-guided joint strike missile ensures that we will be able to strike even well-defended targets at extended distances, which strengthens our ability to deter any potential opponent. A predictable Norwegian presence prohibits the development of a dangerous power vacuum in the region and demonstrates our intent to defend our sovereignty.

The development of Russian strategic capabilities, both conventional and nuclear, combined with exercises and training in the North has increased Russia's ability to deter and defend in the maritime domain. The need for a 360-degree approach to deterrence and collective defense is more important than ever. We must view the potential threat to the northern and Baltic regions as interlinked, emphasize anti-submarine operations, and secure sea lines of communication across the Atlantic. Consequently, we must address the developments on NATO's maritime flanks in the form of increased Allied presence, situational awareness, surveillance, and intelligence sharing.

There is great continuity in the High North. Yet, the grave new developments in international relations in recent years, particularly the increased tensions between Russia and Western countries after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Eastern Ukraine, demand robust and reliable situational awareness, including in the North. Russia's decision to set aside international law has displayed its willingness and ability to use

military means to back up its spheres-of-interest rhetoric. Together with our allies, we have been very clear that putting “might over right” is unacceptable. We must never forget the price our forefathers paid for peace and stability on our continent. During the more than seven decades that have passed since the end of World War II, international law has been our first line of defense, and so it must remain. “A Europe whole and free and at peace,” based on the values of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law was, is, and will always be our goal.⁷

Collective Response: Looking to the NATO Summit in Warsaw and Beyond

It should be clear that challenges in the northernmost part of the Allied area of responsibility concern us all. We need a coherent, consistent, and comprehensive response to the changing strategic environment in the North Atlantic. Together with the United Kingdom, France, and Iceland, Norway has actively promoted an initiative to strengthen NATO’s maritime flank in the North Atlantic. I would like to offer the essence of our joint initiative for the NATO summit in Warsaw, Poland, in July 2016. The ultimate aim is to adapt NATO to an ever-changing security environment. We wish to include the maritime domain of collective defense as part of the agenda for NATO’s development for Warsaw and beyond.

- **Strengthen NATO’s Maritime Capabilities.** First, NATO needs to pay more attention to the maritime domain and its impact on Alliance security. This requires true high-end Allied maritime capabilities. NATO’s maritime flanks are of overall strategic importance, and this needs to be fully recognized. Developments in the High North, and proper analyses of the

implications of Russia’s maritime doctrine, must be taken into consideration. We need to make sure that relevant capability requirements are fed into the NATO Defense Planning Process. Our forces must have relevant readiness and responsiveness.

- **Improve Command and Control Structure.** Second, we must take a close look at NATO’s command structure (NCS) and the command elements of the NATO force structure (NFS) to have the ability to plan, lead, and execute joint and combined operations. In particular, we need a better command arrangement with competence in full-spectrum maritime high-end blue-water operations. This requires close links among national headquarters, regional experts, and the NCS. Norway has for some time been an advocate of a stronger regional orientation to our command structure to better utilize situational awareness and operational insights. The importance of relevant and timely command and control arrangements cannot be overstated.

- **Increase Training, Exercises, and Presence.** Third, we need to think comprehensively about training and exercises in NATO. In addition to boosting interoperability and providing familiarity and understanding of the area of responsibility, training and exercises signal Allied cohesion and solidarity. This should have a deterring effect. Naval ships are warfighting systems that require highly trained and specialized personnel. We must facilitate conditions for relevant high-end training and exercises, including in the most demanding scenarios. It is important that NATO’s integrated military structure runs a comprehensive exercise and training program and is able to draw the necessary lessons from this activity. Norway

is looking forward to hosting NATO's high visibility exercise Trident Juncture in 2018, one of the alliance's largest exercises. We envisage a training scenario where the focus is on demonstrating deterrence and defense of the northernmost area of the alliance. Trident Juncture 2018 will consist of both a live exercise in October 2018 and a command post exercise in November 2018.

The abovementioned trinity—to strengthen capabilities, improve command and control, and increase training, exercises, and presence—will contribute to our goal of a NATO that remains politically and militarily credible. In Warsaw, we will chart the course for the Alliance's long-term adaptation to the new security environment, so that NATO stands ready to defend all allies against any threat from any direction. Given the new security challenges, we need to be able to operate

in the air, on land, and at sea. The way forward is doctrinal and technological interoperability among systems, domains, and countries.

Prospects: A Call for Maritime Power and Presence in the High North

The bedrock of Allied deterrence and collective defense is a strong and united transatlantic link. NATO currently faces challenges that require it to pay careful attention to its eastern and southern flanks, but we must not lose sight of the strategic changes in the North. Because of the need to remain vigilant and alert in this region, Norway is committed to drawing the attention of allies towards the north. This is part of our contribution to burden sharing and collective security, and is also part of NATO's 360-degree approach.

It is high time to review NATO's maritime posture. Strategic stability in Europe depends



Norwegian Armed Forces

Dutch infantry deployed by a U.S. Marine Corps helicopter during exercise Cold Response 2016.

on the credibility of NATO's collective defense capability, which in turn depends on open sea lines between the United States and Europe. As we prepare for the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw, we must assess the new security environment as it is, not as we wish it to be. We must think strategically at the same time as each country takes regional responsibility. And we must strengthen the transatlantic link in both political and maritime terms. In short, NATO needs a coherent and robust long-term strategy to deal with the new security environment. A key element of that strategy must be maritime power and presence in the North.

PRISM

Notes

¹ NATO, "Statement by NATO Defence Ministers," June 25, 2015, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_121133.htm?selectedLocale=en>.

² Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures," November 30, 2011, <<http://www.osce.org/fsc/86597?download=true>>.

³ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Treaty on Open Skies," March 24, 1992, <<http://www.osce.org/library/14127?download=true>>.

⁴ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe," November 19, 1990, <<http://www.osce.org/library/14087?download=true>>.

⁵ "The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states, Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic." Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States are the members of the Arctic Council. In addition, "six organizations representing Arctic Indigenous peoples have status as Permanent Participants." Arctic Council, "The Arctic Council: A backgrounder," May 20, 2015. <<http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us>>.

⁶ The Arctic Council, "The Ilulissat Declaration," May 28, 2008, <http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat_Declaration.pdf>.

⁷ Phrase used by President George H. W. Bush. See: Ambassador Robert Hunter, "Perspectives: 'Europe Whole and Free:' Ukraine Should Impel a Return to First Principles," *The European Institute* (May 2014), <<http://www.europeaninstitute.org/index.php/ei-blog/196-european-affairs/ea-may-2014/1903-perspectives-europe-whole-and-free-ukraine-should-impel-a-return-to-first-principles>>.